Approved for Release: 2018/10/02 C02996512

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The National Intelligence Daily

Published by the Director of Central Intelligence for Named Principals Only

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SATURDAY MAY 1, 1976 VOLUME 3, NUMBER 103

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Argentina

Curb on Vigilantes

Argentine President Videla is attempting to curb right-wing vigilante activity.

The President has met with top army officers to tell them of his strong desire for their cooperation in ending the excesses of security officials, some of whom have killed left-wing subversives. Regional army commanders responded by cracking down on the extra-legal activities of police officers, over whom the army has jurisdiction.

Right-wing violence has become a major headache for the government because Videla and the junta want desperately to avoid the criticism that has been leveled at regimes—notably Chile's—that have been accused of being overly repressive. Videla also wants to assert his authority at a time when some critics have accused him of being indecisive.

By ordering an end to right-wing violence, Videla is directly challenging some of his military colleagues who favor drastic measures against the left. They feel that vigilante activities are justified as retaliation for the steady stream of killings by left-wing terrorists.

Videla's failure to contain the right would be a severe blow to his prestige and could invite other challenges to his authority.

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